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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. **The International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW)** — known worldwide as **BPW International** — commends the recent decision of the sixty-fourth General Assembly to merge the four gender entities of the United Nations into UN-Women — the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. We applaud Member States for having taken this major step forward for the world's women and girls. This unanimous decision by the General Assembly will significantly boost United Nations efforts to promote gender equality, expand opportunity, and tackle discrimination around the globe to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

2. IFBPW has advocated for the creation of a strong United Nations organization that will champion promotion and advancement of the rights of women and girls worldwide and serve as a single well-funded recognized driver to lead the United Nations response for gender equality support. IFBPW wholeheartedly welcomes the appointment of former President of Chile Michelle Bachelet as the first head of UN-Women and as Under-Secretary-General and looks forward to working with UN-Women to support intergovernmental bodies like the Commission on the Status of Women and ensure that all United Nations agencies and organizations live up to their commitments to gender equality.

3. In consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1947, IFBPW represents the interests of working women from 96 countries. In 2010, IFBPW commemorated 80 years of advocating for gender equality and empowering women educationally, politically and economically, developing the business and professional potential of women at all levels, determined that our effort will lead to equal participation of women and men in power and decision-making roles.

4. Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors and throughout all levels of economic activity is essential to build strong economies; establish more stable and just societies; achieve internationally agreed goals for development, sustainability and human rights; improve quality of life for women, men, families and communities; and propel businesses' operations and goals. Yet, ensuring the inclusion of women's talents, skills and experience requires intentional actions and deliberate policies. The Women's Empowerment Principles, forged through a multi-stakeholder consultative process led by UNIFEM (part of UN-Women) and the United Nations Global Compact, provide a set of considerations to help the private sector focus on key elements integral to promoting gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community.[1]

5. IFBPW is leading the Women's Empowerment Principles awareness campaign, recognizing that this century calls for an equitable world that allows equal access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work. Much work, however, is still required in order to realize this vision, with partnerships playing an increasingly vital role to enable the active and interactive participation of governments, international financial institutions, the private sector,

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* Issued without formal editing.

[1] "Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business", a booklet produced by the Women's Empowerment Principles initiative under a partnership between UNIFEM and the United Nations Global Compact.

investors, non-governmental organizations, academia and professional organizations working together.

Gender stereotyping exists

6. Gendered divisions of labour are the result of perceptions of what constitutes appropriate work for women and have perpetuated social norms and gender stereotypes. According to the 2010 Education For All Global Monitoring Report, the share of out-of-school girls has declined from 58 per cent to 54 per cent, and the gender gap is narrowing in primary education in many countries. However, in order to get girls to stay in school an environment must be created which will successfully foster their progress from primary to secondary school and possibly post-secondary education. Girls need a better understanding of the world of work, they need to experience working in jobs traditionally done by men, and they need more and better career information, advice and guidance. Education and training, particularly in those vocational subjects mainly taken up by boys, should be made more accessible and appealing to girls. If girls are made more aware of the consequences of their choices for their future pay and career progression, they might make different choices.

7. Although family and care responsibilities may limit women's choice of careers, in fact research has suggested that besides gender role stereotyping, the options available to women are limited by social and structural factors, such as limited childcare options and a lack of flexible working options. The number of women and underrepresented minorities in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines has greatly improved over the past several decades, but institutional efforts to recruit, train, retain, and promote their participation in STEM fields are still inadequate.

8. Women are 51 per cent of the nation's population. Using their talents to the fullest at all levels of scientific and technological education, training and employment is an economic necessity and an investment in a country's future national development. IFBPW believes that continued underrepresentation and under-participation of women in SET-based education, training and employment is not only a cause for social concern on equity grounds, it is also likely to inhibit a country's capacity to develop internationally competitive research and industries.

9. For nearly 40 years, the Association for Women in Science has promoted diversity in the academic and corporate scientific workplace maintaining that a diverse scientific workforce will benefit not only individual scientists but also the national economy. Industries that have made efforts to enhance diversity in their workplace argue that increasing diversity can serve to improve innovation, productivity, and global competition. It therefore makes sense for an organization to be an inclusive employer, appealing to as diverse a range of people as possible.

Participation of women and girls in education, training and lifelong learning

10. Women represent 60 per cent of university graduates in Europe and North America, in excess of 50 per cent in the Asia-Pacific region, and 70 per cent in the United Arab Emirates. According to the 2010 MDG report, access to education has increased globally for girls at all levels, and particularly in primary education, over the last decade. However, despite the fact that in many developed countries women now account for more than half of college and university graduates, job

opportunities for women and the wages paid to them still lag behind those of their male counterparts, even in developed countries, and these gaps are even larger in most developing countries. **Equality in education has failed to translate into equality in the workforce.** This is clearly illustrated by the low level of women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions in all sectors. Improvements in access to education, skills development and training are essential to enhance women's access to emerging opportunities. Strengthening gender equality will increase the probability of organizations' recruiting the best people for the job, rather than just the best of the traditionally available pool.

11. To ensure equal access to employment, families, schools and the media, among other structures and agencies, should undertake the following strategies: enhance girls' access to education; desegregate education so that girls and boys can learn together; promote "employment-based" education, not just skills for specific jobs; raise awareness and combat gender stereotyping; encourage equal skills development for girls and boys.

12. In a modern economy, lifelong learning is vitally important. Workers need to be adaptable and able to take advantage of the growth of new sectors and new technologies. Opportunities for women to equip themselves with the skills and confidence to move into management roles and occupations traditionally regarded as "men's jobs" are important.[2] Lifelong learning, apprenticeship opportunities, and vocational training policies must be oriented towards gender equity and accessible equally to both women and men to enable them to adapt to changing skills and technological demands. Setting targets for gender balance within training, ensuring flexible training delivery times and methodologies, eliminating stereotypes in curricula, and raising awareness in the wider community can be helpful in facilitating equal access for women to these opportunities.

Equal pay for work of equal value

13. Gender equality is now globally accepted as a necessity for sustainable development and poverty reduction for women and men, improving living standards for all. Despite advances in educational levels, women are overrepresented in low-paying jobs; women are underrepresented in executive, management and technical positions.

14. It is easy to identify direct wage discrimination between men and women performing the same job, but it is harder to identify and remedy unequal remuneration for "work of equal value". Remedying such inequities is essential. Special effort must be made so that the principle of equal pay for "work of equal value" is understood and applied, as appropriate, for example, by job evaluation on the basis of objective and non-discriminatory criteria.

15. Overall, throughout the world, the figures for the gender pay gap range from 13 per cent to 23 per cent.[3] To maintain fair and equitable workplaces, IFBPW launched the Equal Pay Day awareness campaign internationally in 2009, mobilizing members around the world to educate their communities and the private sector on the benefits of pay equity. Affiliates provide illustrations of the number of

[2] Women and Work Commission, "Shaping a fairer future".

[3] C. Chubb, S. Melis, L. Potter and R. Storry, eds., International Trade Union Confederation Reports 2008, "The Global Gender Pay Gap", Brussels.

extra days women have to work after the end of the financial year to earn the same as men.

The rationale for gender equality at work

16. Gender equality is a matter of social justice and is anchored in both a rights-based and an economic efficiency approach. The benefits of achieving gender equality through better access to quality education and skills development, vocational and occupational training and lifelong learning cannot be overestimated. Decent work can be achieved by supplying productive and quality employment opportunities for both women and men and through strategies with a life cycle perspective looking especially at situations of transition in the lives of women and men.

17. The Women's Empowerment Principles are informed by real-life business practices, helping companies tailor existing policies and practices — or establish needed new ones — to improve the working environment through better choices for their "corporate citizens".

Promoting the interests of women and girls across the globe

18. In conclusion, the Member States approach to access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work, must stem from the fundamental principle articulated at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, that "women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights". Furthermore, articles 10 and 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls for appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education and in the workplace, including non-discrimination in employment, equal pay for equal work, and paid maternity leave.

19. Because gender equality can bring early returns, Governments must affirm their commitment to it and develop the legal policies and frameworks to make it work. Gender equality is integral to a more far-sighted strategy, one that ensures that science, education and technology play their full part in the regeneration of the economy, and that enable women to play a full and active role as scientists, technologists and members of society. While there has been measurable progress in improving the lives of women and girls, critical goals remain unfilled and need global attention and global action. If gender equality is a birthright, why would we settle for anything less?